

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AND TEACHERS' WORK EFFECTIVENESS: A CASE OF DELTA AND EDO STATES' SECONDARY SCHOOLS, NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies effectiveness in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria, with attention to the moderating role of teachers' professional experience. A correlational survey design was adopted, drawing a sample of 445 teachers from a population of 10,262 teachers across 810 schools through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using the researcher-developed Principals' Conflict Resolution Techniques and Teachers' Effectiveness Questionnaire (PCMTWPQ), which yielded Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients of 0.72 and 0.83, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics - mean, standard deviation, coefficient of determination, and inferential statistic - regression analysis at the .05 level of significance. Results showed that teachers' exhibited a high level of work effectiveness, that principals' conflict resolution strategies had a strong, significant, positive relationship with teachers' work effectiveness, and that professional experience significantly strengthened this relationship. The study concludes that principals' competence in resolving conflicts, reinforced by teachers' accumulated professional experience, is central to sustaining teacher effectiveness in Nigerian public secondary schools.

Keywords: Conflict resolution strategies, educational leadership, teachers', effectiveness, professional experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools are social systems in which principals, teachers, students, and parents interact continually, and the resulting differences in interests, values, and expectations make conflict an unavoidable feature of organizational life. Conflict is not inherently destructive; when properly managed, it can stimulate innovation and improved decision-making, but when mismanaged, it can cause great harm a relationship and to the institution (Rahim, 2017; Peretomode, 2020a; Robbins & Judge, 2022). It is a normal part of any healthy human relationship. Conflict is more than just a disagreement. It is a situation in which one or both parties perceive a threat, whether or not the treat is real (Peretomode, 2020b; Segal, Robinson, and Smith, 2026). Due to the fact that school effectiveness depends largely on how such conflicts are respectfully and positively handled, conflict resolution remains a central concern in educational administration.

Conflict resolution refers to the process of diagnosing and intervening in disagreements or disputes or conflicts in ways to reach a peaceful, and workable solution that enhance organizational outcomes rather than simply suppressing it (Rahim, 2017). Success relies on emotional regulation, active listening, and focusing on underlying needs rather than fixed positions. The goal is to preserve relationships, de-escalate tension, and build trust (Shonk, 2026; Segal, Robinson & Smith, 2026).

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Thomas and Kilmann (2008) classified the principal approaches leaders use to manage conflict as collaborating, accommodating, competing, avoiding, and compromising. In schools, principals are expected to apply such strategies to maintain stability and sustain an environment conducive to teaching and learning, underscoring the broader link between leadership practice and school functioning.

School leadership is widely recognized as one of the most influential school-level factors shaping educational outcomes. Effective principals coordinate resources, support teachers, and create the conditions for strong organizational performance (Hallinger, 2018), and the quality of relationships they build with staff influences morale, commitment, and productivity (Northouse, 2022). Within the Nigerian context specifically, Imhangbe, Okecha, and Obozuwa (2019) found that principals' leadership style was significantly related to teachers' job performance in Edo Central schools, reinforcing the relevance of examining how principals manage relational tensions such as conflict. Because conflict often stems from communication breakdowns, role ambiguity, and resource constraints, the manner in which principals respond to such situations is likely to shape teachers' work experiences and, in turn, their performance.

Teachers' work effectiveness is central to educational quality, since teachers remain the primary agents of curriculum delivery and student development. It encompasses instructional planning, classroom management, assessment, and participation in school activities (Stronge, 2018). Supportive organizational climates and positive workplace relationships have been shown to enhance employee performance and commitment (Colquitt et al., 2021), suggesting that how conflict is handled within a school may shape the conditions under which teachers carry out their duties.

In many developing-country contexts, including Nigeria, conditions such as inadequate resources, heavy workloads, and divergent stakeholder interests intensify the likelihood of conflict, and unresolved disputes can disrupt communication and staff cohesion (Oplatka, 2017; Bush, 2020). These pressures place a premium on principals' ability to resolve conflict in ways that sustain productive working relationships. How teachers respond to such efforts, however, may depend on their professional experience: more experienced teachers tend to have greater familiarity with institutional procedures and stronger coping mechanisms, which can shape how they interpret and react to leadership practice (Day & Gu, 2014). Ugwuanyi and Pietsch (2024) similarly found that experience-related factors interact with leadership processes to influence outcomes in Nigerian school settings, lending support to the possibility that professional experience conditions the link between principals' conflict resolution and teacher performance.

Despite growing interest in conflict resolution within educational organizations, evidence on how principals' conflict resolution practices relate to teachers' effectiveness across Nigerian contexts remains limited, and the potential moderating role of teachers' professional experience has received even less attention. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' effectiveness in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States, with particular focus on the moderating role of professional experience.

Statement of the Problem

School effectiveness depends on teachers performing their instructional and professional duties well, yet the continuous interaction of individuals with differing interests, personalities, and responsibilities makes conflict in schools inevitable. Conflict itself is not necessarily harmful; what matters is how it is handled or resolved, since well-handled conflict can promote collaboration and growth, while poorly handled conflict breeds tension, dissatisfaction, and reduced commitment. Principals are therefore expected to possess the skills needed to resolve conflict in ways that sustain positive working relationships and support optimal teacher performance.

Concerns nonetheless persist about uneven levels of commitment, productivity, and work performance among teachers across secondary schools, and it remains unclear how far principals' conflict resolution strategies are associated with these differences. Teachers' professional experience may further shape how they perceive and respond to such strategies, but this potential moderating role has received limited empirical attention, particularly in Delta and Edo States. The problem this study addresses, therefore, is the extent to which principals' conflict resolution strategies relate to teachers' effectiveness, and whether professional experience moderates this relationship, in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 13, Issue 3, pp: (28-35), Month: May - June 2026, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com**Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' effectiveness in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine the level of teachers' effectiveness in Delta and Edo States;
2. ascertain the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' effectiveness in Delta and Edo States; and
3. determine the moderating effect of teachers' professional experience on the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' work effectiveness in Delta and Edo States.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of teachers' work performance in Delta and Edo States?
2. What is the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' work performance in Delta and Edo States?
3. To what extent does teachers' professional experience moderate the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' work effectiveness in Delta and Edo States?

Hypotheses

The following two null hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' effectiveness in Delta and Edo States.
2. Teachers' professional experience does not significantly moderate the relationship between principals' conflict resolution strategies and teachers' work effectiveness in Delta and Edo States.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Human Relations Theory, originating from Mayo's (1933) Hawthorne studies, which holds that interpersonal relationships, communication, and employee satisfaction, not economic incentives alone, drive organizational effectiveness. Applied to schools, the theory suggests that principals who build positive relationships and resolve conflict constructively create supportive work environments that strengthen teachers' commitment and performance. The theory is relevant here because it offers a lens for understanding how principals' conflict resolution practices may translate into improved teacher effectiveness through strengthened human relations within the school system.

Principals' Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict resolution strategies are the approaches leaders use to prevent, manage, and resolve disagreements or conflicts peacefully among organizational members. Rahim (2023) classified these as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Strategies grounded in collaboration and accommodation tend to build trust and cooperation, whereas poorly applied strategies can heighten tension and depress productivity.

Teachers' Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness refers to a teacher's ability to positively impact student learning, growth, and long term success through the effectiveness with which teachers discharge their professional responsibilities, spanning instructional planning and delivery, classroom management, assessment practices, and participation in school life, and professionalism (Stronge, 2018). It goes beyond simply knowing the subject matter and involves engaging students, fostering social – emotional development, and building a supportive learning environment (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Teachers' Professional Experience

Professional experience denotes the knowledge and competence teachers accumulate through years of classroom practice, teaching methods, and student outcomes. It contributes to resilience, adaptability, and instructional competence, equipping

experienced teachers to navigate workplace demands more effectively than their less experienced counterparts (Day & Gu, 2020).

Empirical evidence broadly supports a link between constructive leadership practice and employee outcomes. In a meta-analysis of leadership behaviours, Harms et al. (2017) found that constructive leadership, including the effective handling of interpersonal conflict, was positively associated with employee performance and well-being. Within educational settings, Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2017) reported that collaborative leadership behaviours reduced workplace tension and improved staff performance, while Rahim (2023) observed that constructive conflict management fosters organizational learning, commitment, and performance through mutual understanding. Closer to the present context, Imhangbe et al. (2019) found that principals’ leadership style significantly predicted teachers’ job performance in Edo State, and Ugwuanyi and Pietsch (2024) showed that experience-related leadership factors shape school outcomes in Nigerian settings, underscoring the relevance of experience-based variables in Nigerian educational leadership research.

Most of this evidence, however, derives from general organizational settings or from educational systems outside Nigeria, and few studies have examined teachers’ professional experience as a moderator of the conflict resolution – effectiveness relationship. This study addresses that contextual and moderating-variable gap by examining principals’ conflict resolution strategies and teachers’ work effectiveness, and the moderating role of professional experience, in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational survey design to examine the relationship between principals’ conflict resolution strategies and teachers’ work effectiveness, and the moderating role of professional experience, in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria. The design was appropriate for establishing the extent of association among the variables without manipulating them.

The population comprised 10,262 teachers across 810 public secondary schools in the two states, based on records obtained from the respective State Ministries of Education. A multistage sampling procedure, combining stratification and simple random sampling, yielded a sample of 445 teachers: 250 from Delta State and 195 from Edo State.

Data were collected using the researcher-developed Principals’ Conflict Management and Teachers’ Work Performance Questionnaire (PCMTWPQ), comprising three sections: demographic characteristics, including professional experience (Section A); 36 items measuring conflict resolution strategies across the collaborating, accommodating, avoiding, and competing dimensions (Section B); and 15 items assessing teachers’ work effectiveness (Section C), all rated on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated by specialists in Educational Management and in Measurement and Evaluation, and Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients of 0.72 and 0.83 were obtained for the conflict resolution strategies and work effectiveness scales respectively.

The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, administered 445 copies of the questionnaire, of which 439 were retrieved, a 98.6% return rate. Descriptive statistics - Mean and standard deviation were used to answer Research Question 1; coefficient of determination (r^2) was used to answer Research Questions 2 and 3; simple linear regression tested Hypothesis 1; and multiple regression tested Hypothesis 2, all at the .05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS

Table 1: Summary of Teachers’ Work Effectiveness in Delta and Edo States

State	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Remark
Delta State	3.40	0.90	High
Edo State	3.44	0.88	High
Both States	3.42	0.89	High
Average Mean/SD	3.42	0.89	High

Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.50 = High; Mean $<$ 2.50 = Low.

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Table 1 shows that teachers in both states exhibit a high level of work performance and effectiveness: Delta State recorded a mean of 3.40 (SD = 0.90) and Edo State a mean of 3.44 (SD = 0.88), for a combined mean of 3.42 (SD = 0.89), well above the criterion mean of 2.50. The similarity of scores across the two states suggests a comparable standard of professional practice, and the moderate standard deviations indicate reasonable agreement among respondents that teachers generally discharge their instructional and professional responsibilities effectively, and therefore are considered effective.

Table 2: Relationship between Principals’ Conflict Resolution Strategies and Teachers’ Work Effectiveness in Delta and Edo States

State	Variable	N	Mean	R	r ²	r ² %	Remark
Delta	Conflict Management Strategy	31	2.73	0.682 ^a	0.464	46.4	Strong Positive Relationship
	Teacher Work Performance	216	3.40				
Edo	Conflict Management Strategy	13	2.77	0.698 ^a	0.487	48.7	Very Strong Positive Relationship
	Teacher Work Performance	179	3.44				

Table 2 shows a strong positive relationship between principals’ conflict resolution strategies and teachers’ work effectiveness in both states. In Delta State, the correlation between the strategies of 31 principals and the performance of 216 teachers was strong and positive ($r = .682, r^2 = .464$), indicating that conflict resolution practices accounted for 46.4% of the variance in teacher effectiveness. In Edo State, the relationship was even stronger ($r = .698, r^2 = .487$), accounting for 48.7% of the variance among 179 teachers and 13 principals. These results suggest that collaborative and inclusive approaches to resolving conflict have a substantial bearing on how effectively teachers perform their duties in both states.

Table 3: Moderating Effect of Teachers’ Professional Experience on the Relationship between Principals’ Conflict resolution Strategies and Teachers’ Work Effectiveness in Public Secondary Schools in Delta and Edo States

State	Variable	N	Mean	R	r ²	r ² %	Remark
Delta	Conflict Management Strategy	31	2.73	0.710 ^a	0.505	50.5	Very Strong Positive Relationship
	Teacher Experience/Work Performance	216	3.43				
Edo	Conflict Management Strategy	13	2.77	0.730 ^a	0.533	53.3	Very Strong Positive Relationship
	Teacher Experience/Work Performance	179	3.45				

Table 3 illustrates how teachers’ professional experience strengthens this relationship. In Delta State, the correlation rises to .710 ($r^2 = .505$) when experience is considered alongside conflict resolution strategies, indicating that the two factors jointly explain 50.5% of the variance in teacher effectiveness. In Edo State, the relationship strengthens further to .730 ($r^2 = .533$), accounting for 53.3% of the variance. In both states, more experienced teachers appear to respond more favourably to principals’ conflict resolution efforts, translating into stronger work performance.

Table 4: Linear Regression of Principals’ Conflict Resolution Strategies and Teachers’ Work Effectiveness in Delta and Edo States

State	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Delta	Regression	26.270	1	26.270	294.771	0.000 ^b
	Residual	17.290	245	0.089		
	Total	43.560	246			
Edo	Regression	30.155	1	30.155	309.592	0.000 ^b
	Residual	18.409	190	0.097		
	Total	48.564	191			

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The linear regression results in Table 4 confirm that principals’ conflict resolution strategies significantly predict teachers’ work effectiveness in both states. In Delta State, the regression model yielded $F = 294.771$ ($p < .001$), and in Edo State, $F = 309.592$ ($p < .001$). Since both significance values fall below .05, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a significant relationship between principals’ conflict resolution strategies and teachers’ work effectiveness.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis of Teachers’ Professional Experience Moderating the Relationship between Principals’ Conflict Resolution Strategies and Teachers’ Work Effectiveness in Delta and Edo States

State	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Delta	Regression	44.360	2	22.180	157.325	0.000 ^b
	Residual	17.290	245	0.089		
	Total	43.560	246			
Edo	Regression	47.255	2	23.628	163.529	0.000 ^b
	Residual	18.409	190	0.097		
	Total	45.564	191			

The multiple regression results in Table 5 confirm that professional experience significantly moderates this relationship. In Delta State, the model yielded $F = 157.325$ ($p < .001$), and in Edo State, $F = 163.529$ ($p < .001$). With both significance values below .05, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that teachers’ professional experience significantly moderates the relationship between principals’ conflict resolution strategies and teachers’ work effectiveness.

5. DISCUSSION

Teachers in public secondary schools in both Delta and Edo States demonstrated a high level of work effectiveness, consistent with Stronge’s (2018) view that effective work effectiveness is reflected in teachers’ instructional delivery, classroom management, and contribution to school goals. It also aligns with Day and Gu’s (2020) observation that professional resilience sustains teacher effectiveness despite workplace pressures. This finding offers current, comparative evidence that teachers across both states maintain a similarly high standard of performance, establishing a baseline against which organizational factors such as conflict resolution can be examined.

Principals’ conflict resolution strategies showed a strong, positive relationship with teachers’ work effectiveness in both states, suggesting that how principals handle conflict has a tangible bearing on teachers’ effectiveness. This corroborates Rahim’s (2023) argument that constructive conflict resolution builds cooperation and trust, and aligns with Harms et al.’s (2017) finding that positive leadership behaviours, including effective handling of interpersonal issues, improve employee outcomes. It is also consistent with Imhangbe et al.’s (2019) finding that principals’ leadership style significantly predicted teachers’ job performance in neighbouring Edo Central schools. What this study adds is a quantified, state-specific estimate of how much variance in teacher performance principals’ conflict management strategies explain in Delta and Edo States, extending the evidence base for Southern Nigeria.

Teachers’ professional experience strengthened the relationship between principals’ conflict resolution strategies and work effectiveness, indicating that more experienced teachers respond more favourably to principals’ conflict resolution efforts. This is consistent with Day and Gu’s (2020) view that experience builds capacity to adapt to organizational challenges, and with Ugwuanyi and Pietsch’s (2024) finding that experience-related factors interact with leadership processes to shape outcomes in Nigerian schools. It also lends support to Human Relations Theory, which holds that positive workplace interactions yield more favourable outcomes when individuals bring the experience and social competence needed to navigate organizational relationships. By introducing professional experience as a moderating variable, this finding extends a line of inquiry that has received limited attention in educational management literature.

The regression results confirm that principals’ conflict management strategies are not merely associated with, but significantly predict, teachers’ work performance in both states. This is consistent with Rahim’s (2023) contention that leaders who manage conflict effectively create environments that enhance commitment and productivity, and with Bush’s (2020) observation that school leadership practices shape staff behaviour and organizational performance. The finding

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strengthens the empirical case that conflict management functions as a meaningful predictor, rather than a peripheral correlate, of teacher effectiveness in Nigerian public secondary schools.

Finally, the multiple regression results confirm that professional experience significantly moderates the conflict resolution - effectiveness relationship, implying that the effectiveness of principals' conflict resolution depends partly on how much experience teachers bring to the workplace. Experienced teachers appear better positioned to interpret and respond constructively to administrative efforts at resolving conflict, consistent with Day and Gu's (2020) view of experience as a source of resilience and adaptability. This pattern echoes broader evidence that contextual and individual-level factors condition leadership effects on teacher outcomes; Hallinger et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis, for instance, found that the strength of principal leadership effects on teacher efficacy varies systematically with contextual factors. By moving beyond a direct-effect model, this finding highlights professional experience as an important contingency shaping how principals' conflict resolution translates into improved teacher performance and effectiveness.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, teachers in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States perform at a high level, and this performance and effectiveness is strongly linked to how effectively principals resolve conflict. The strength of this link depends partly on teachers' professional experience, with more experienced teachers responding more favourably to principals' conflict management efforts. Effective conflict resolution is therefore not a peripheral administrative skill but a core lever for sustaining teacher effectiveness, one whose impact is amplified where schools also draw on the accumulated experience of their teaching staff.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. State Ministries of Education and school management boards should institutionalize regular, competency-based training for principals in collaborative and integrative conflict management strategies, rather than relying on occasional or ad hoc workshops.
2. Principals should be encouraged to adopt collaborative and participatory approaches to resolving staff disagreements, since these strategies showed the strongest association with improved teacher performance in this study.
3. School authorities should formalize mentorship structures that pair experienced teachers with less experienced colleagues, given the demonstrated role of professional experience in strengthening teachers' responses to conflict resolution efforts.
4. Leadership evaluation and appraisal frameworks for principals should explicitly include conflict resolution competence as a measurable criterion, rather than treating it as a general, unmeasured leadership trait.
5. Future research should extend this inquiry to other Nigerian states and school types, including private secondary schools, to test the generalizability of these findings beyond the public secondary school systems of Delta and Edo States.

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